

At Last in Print

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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EDITORIAL

At Last in Print

Ever since its commencement 28 years ago, supporters of the Newsletter have been hoping that one day it could be printed, instead of cyclostyled, so that sketches and photographs could be included. So here at last, through the kindness of Mr. S. Sridhar, and the initiative of Dr. Joseph George, we have the first printed effort. If costs prove to be reasonable and if we can sustain this effort we will continue in this fashion. The possibility of including illustrations is, of course, a major advantage.

The January-March 1988 issue of World Birdwatch, the Newsletter of the International Council for Bird Preservation, refers to a study to preserve Biodiversity. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, President of W.W.F. said : "The great thing about birds is that they are more visible than everything else, or any other form of wildlife. Almost anybody can see them. There are more people probably watching birds, taking an interest, than any other kind of natural history; and birds form a kind of flagship for a great deal of conservation activity. A lot of conservation projects to the benefit of a great many other species can be hung on birds." As indicator species of the environment, birds are a matchless resource and the growing interest in them in this country will be of great advantage to the conservation movement.

World Birdwatch also refers to the Migratory Birds Programme. Resident birds are constantly before us and we can monitor their status with comparative ease. But the population and status of migrants pose serious problems for the investigator. "Their mobility and tendency to concentrate in very large numbers in their breeding grounds or in the wintering quarters, makes migratory species extremely susceptible to changes in the environment and fluctuations in the level of human exploitation or persecution..... Through continuous publicity by the M.B.P. about the illegal taking of migratory birds during their spring and autumn migration, the illegal killing of migrants in such notorious bottlenecks as the Gironde in France and the Straits of Messina in Italy, has been reduced markedly. In the Gironde, for instance, in May 1985, an estimated 10,000 Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) hunters were active; that number fell to 7 8000 in 1986, and to 1000 last spring"

Export Quotas of our Birds

In India, it is not so much hunting as illegal trapping and habitat destruction, which is responsible for endangering our birds. The Government of India has to be careful about fixing export quotas of various species. In a recent meeting convened by Shri M.K. Ranjitsinh, IAS, Joint Secretary (Wildlife) in the Ministry of Environment, it was decided that knowledgeable birdwatchers in the country should provide information about the status of certain species which are exported. When a large number of reports come in from various geographical areas, it will enable the Government to fix export targets which do not affect the future of the species in our country. For the current year, the following quota has been fixed :

Weaver (only Baya and Striated) .....	5,000
Buntings (only Redheaded & Blackheaded) ...	6,000
Mynas .....	8,000
Sparrows .....	5,000
Crows .....	5,000
Munias .....	45,000

Red Munias .....	5.000
Blue Rock Pigeons .....	10.000
Parakeets, Roseringed .....	80.000

I hope that some of you can make it a point to keep an eye on a particular species, which you are well placed to monitor, and write back to me or to Ranjitsinh, as you wish.

### Crows in Kodaikanal

During a visit to Kodaikanal in February this year, I was anxious to find out if it was true that there were no crows in

Kodaikanal. Alas both *splendens* and *macrohynchos* are now well established there. Many small birds will suffer because of the intrusion of a species which according to Salim Ali "has an infinite capacity for scenting and avoiding danger, (and which) carry him triumphantly through a life of sin and wrong doing". In a way it is an advantage that crows have arrived — they help to clear up the mess which tourists leave behind on the lakeside every day.

## BIRDS SEEN IN MY GARDEN

M.K. HIMMATSINHJI

(Contd.)

Common Silverbill, Whitethroated Munia — *Lonchura malabarica* Although some birds are seen throughout the year, it is only in certain seasons, particularly soon after the monsoon, that this munia comes in flocks to my grounds. Owing to the paucity of its food outside, 100+ White throated Munias came into my place last year. They used to come down to the vegetable and fodder beds as also on dry plots to glean grass seeds etc. Every now and then, when alarmed, they would fly up all together and settle on trees and the nearby telephone wires. They would then come down again in groups of twos and threes and resume feeding. This exercise was repeated several times a day.

This brings me to the end of the account of resident birds.

### The Migrants

With the approaching end of the rainy season in August-September the migrants from across our borders, some birds on passage migration and some more which are resident elsewhere in India (sub-continent) come here at particular times of the year. These are listed as hereunder:

Lesser Whistling Teal, Tree Duck — *Dendrocygna javanica* Whenever there is sufficient amount of rain and the tank just outside the town of Bhuj gets filled up, a pair of Whistling Teal come along and nest in one of the neem trees in my grounds. At first they inspect all the likely sites which to them appear suitable for a nest by flying from one tree to another. Once the choice is made, the female settles down and fashions her nest by bending the soft leafy twigs and tucking them under her body. I have never had the nests inspected for fear of scaring away the duck, but I think the egg-laying takes place in the morning. For after the construction of the nest is completed, I see the birds arrive in the morning, and as soon as the duck settles down in the nest, the drake flies away followed by his mate a little later. This routine is followed till the clutch of eggs is complete and the female settles down to brood over them. I have never observed the drake standing watch over the nest in the tree. I have not been able to ascertain as to how many times this pair has had young ones, but one year I was informed by my staff that they were falling out of the nest. When I went to investigate, I failed to see the ducklings as they must have frozen in the undergrowth; however one of

the parents indulged in the broken wing trick by flying very low over the ground feigning injury to one of its wings! The next morning the ducklings were seen with the parents swimming in the nala next door. They left me wondering as to how they crossed the hurdle of the compound wall which though broken at two places at that time, was difficult for the young to negotiate to be able to reach the water. And their final destination was the tank which is approximately 2 kms. along the meandering nala with quite a few dry stretches along its bed!

### Green Sandpiper — *Tringa ochropus*

This sandpiper circles over my grounds and comes down to sit on the edge of the water storage tank (already mentioned earlier).

### Hoopoe — *Upupa epops*

A winter visitor. Some birds come intermittently to my grounds at the start of the incoming migration, starting from August-September and towards the end of their stay in this country in March-April when they are on their way back to their summer quarters. Mostly I see one bird, and at times a pair. They busily search for food probing the soil with their long curved beaks. For some time I watched a Hoopoe feeding on my lawn and he seemed to know exactly where to probe or dig with his bill to get at a morsel of food.

### Wryneck — *Jynx torquilla*

I have only come across it once or twice. Invariably it is its high-pitched call, ch-k-ch-ch-ch..., that gives notice of the bird's presence. Its voice sounds like that of some of its cousins, the small woodpeckers. Like them the Wryneck also clings to trunks and branches of trees.

### Baybacked Shrike — *Lanius vittatus*

The white patches on its black wings, particularly in flight, help identify this bird. The Redbacked Shrike lacks these mirrors. This shrike is now no longer to be seen in my grounds. Its status here is uncertain; for though resident in Sind. moving about locally, I have seen it only during the cold season; and hence I am inclined to call it more or less a

migrant to Kutch. Dr. Salim Ali found a nest of this shrike with 3 partly fledged chicks in its vicinity on Kala Dungar in Pachham, on the edge of the Great Rann. This is the only breeding record.

#### Redbacked Shrike — *Lanius collurio*

This is one of our regular autumn migrants on passage to its winter quarters in tropical and Southern Africa, moving there through Arabia. Not seen in my grounds since long, but then I have alienated that part of my property which used to have the biotope suitable to this shrike.

#### Rufous Shrike — *Lanius collurio phoenicuroides*

One bird arrives every year in the beginning of the cold weather and generally stays on till about April. This shrike can easily be confused with the juvenile of the preceding species, as also with *L.c. isabellinus* (Pale Brown Shrike which also visits Kutch, No. 943, Synopsis and Handbook Vol.5). The distinguishing feature of the Rufous Shrike, particularly when in good plumage, is the colour of the head which is darker rufous than the whole of the back which is sandy brown. Its call is a harsh chak-chaka-chaka... or kata-kata-kata... which is quite distinctive. This shrike too is more a passage migrant, wintering in Arabia, Sudan and Ethiopia.

#### Grey or Ashy Drongo — *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

A regular winter visitor from the heights of the sub-continent arriving mostly in November and taking over, so to speak, the duties of hunting insect pests in my compound from the Black Drongo who moves out. Curiously enough this bird was missed in Kutch by ornithologists till the late Dharmakumarsinhji recorded it at Mandvi and a specimen was collected by my late brother, M.K. Fatehsinhji, who had accompanied the former on that birdwatching trip.

#### Whitebellied Drongo — *Dicrurus caerulescens*

Like the last one, this drongo is also actually a resident bird in India, migrating locally. Once more in the case of the Whitebellied Drongo, it is the first and only record in this district having been seen by me in my garden on 1.11.56. Thereafter I saw it off and on till 5.3.57. It is a straggler in this area. In its habits it does not differ from the other drongos except that it does not expose itself as much as its other cousins, preferring to remain almost concealed in the foliage of trees.

#### Rosy Pastor — *Sturnus roseus*

A regular and common winter visitor arriving in August-September. They come in flocks consisting of a large number of birds, up to 100 and more. They come and settle on *Salvadora persica* and *capparis aphylla* bushes and chatter away to their hearts content. They stay for some time and are soon on their way to wherever they are going, and this performance is repeated in April when they are on their way back to their breeding places. I have heard them only once this year. Owing to the drought there is not sufficient amount of feeding to be had, and so I suppose they must just pass through.

#### Scarlet Minivet — *Pericrocotus flammeus*

The first sight record of this minivet in this district was in my garden on 25.12.80. It was a female which stayed on till 3.2.81. I again saw a female subsequently (I wonder whether it was the same bird?) on 30.11.81 when it remained in my compound for some days during which period it became lame in one foot. Though resident in India this bird is a rare straggler here.

The call note of this minivet, which attracts ones attention towards it, is quite a distinct whee-tweet or twee-twee uttered now and then. Apart from this, some whistling notes are also uttered, but not often.

#### Redbreasted Flycatcher — *Muscicapa parva*

A regular visitor to my place, a couple of birds spending the whole winter here. They are often joined by others passing through both at the time of the incoming and outgoing migrations.

#### Paradise Flycatcher — *Terpsiphone paradisi*

These are seen once in a while, and then too singly.

#### Blacknaped Flycatcher — *Hypothymis azurea*

Luck again favoured me for being the first to record this bird in Kutch when I saw a female on 13.1.64 once more near Mandvi (as all new records there, in the plantation of Vijaya Vilas Palace). For the sake of record I may mention, that subsequently I saw, in the same location, one male and two females on 9.1.66, a male on 19.11.67, 4 birds on 1.1.68 and the last bird in my garden on 15.4.68. I could not be sure about its sex as the bird was going through a heavy moult; and perhaps for this reason it stayed on in my grounds till 1.6.68. Towards the end of May it started singing a short broken whistling song. Thus perhaps it was a first year male, or, do females also sing in this species? The common call note of this flycatcher is a che-chwe, uttered at short intervals and not unlike the short harsher calls of the Paradise Flycatcher.

#### Orphean Warbler — *Sylvia hortensis*

Seen only twice.

#### Whitethroat — *Sylvia communis*

A common passage migrant seen occasionally in my grounds.

#### Lesser Whitethroat — *Sylvia curruca blythi*

It is always advisable to use binomials when mentioning latin names of birds; I have however purposely noted down the subspecific name in this case as *S.c. minula* also occurs in Kutch, though in a slightly different biotope than obtaining in my grounds. The Lesser Whitethroat (*blythi*) is a regular winter visitor with a few birds spending practically the whole season in my place. They are for ever busily looking for and eating insect life, hardly giving one time to have a proper look at them. They constantly utter a call which sounds like chut-chut-chut interspersed with a louder and harsher cherr-chen-chen....

Brown Leaf Warbler, or Chiffchaff — *Phylloscopus collybita*

Formerly called 'Willow Warbler', this dainty little bird has been regularly visiting my compound. More than half a dozen birds are present. They prefer to gather food at ground level or from the ground, and low down on bushes and hedges, at times settling on and clinging to the trunks of trees to look for weavils etc. A constant flicking of wings, and often the tail too, is a habit peculiar to this species which helps to identify this otherwise plainlooking warbler.

Dull Green Leaf Warbler — *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

This also is a regular migrant to this area. Perhaps more than one race of this species come to us, but it is next to impossible to differentiate them with certainty in the field. The Dull Green Leaf Warbler is a very active bird flitting from one twig to another in quick succession taking short jerky flights and quickly picking up its food while it goes on. The call note of this bird is a sharp and high-pitched chiwee, si-chiwee or chiswee uttered every now and then. This call is common to both the subspecies, *viridanus* as also *nitidus*; and hence identification by the call notes, or sight records could include either one of them.

Bluethroat — *Erithacus svecicus*

This visitor comes to my garden at the start of the incoming migration and then just before leaving our limits when some individuals are in good plumage with the males having the blue colour on their throats and with the orange chestnut of the rump and tail showing off as the bird flies and dives into a hedge or shrubbery. I have never seen more than one bird at a time in my place.

Black Redstart — *Phoenicurus ochruros*

A pair plus an odd bird, at times, always present. They hardly ever come right inside my grounds, but remain on the periphery.

Tree Pipit — *Anthus trivialis*

Some birds come to my grounds in the cold weather, however they are not regular in their visits.

Tawny Pipit — *Anthus campestris*

This Palaearctic species is a rare entrant into my grounds and is met with irregularly. It prefers to remain on the dry barren plots. I of course see it more often just outside my compound on the edge of the playing field. Some other races of pipits also possibly come to Kutch, but in their case too it is difficult to tell them apart in the field.

Forest Wagtail — *Motacilla indica*

One more vagrant recorded for the first time in my garden on 10.1.67 and was last seen on 16.1.67. Thereafter I came across this wagtail in the garden of Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi. Unlike the other wagtails this one moves its tail in a slow horizontal movement from side to side. With this its body also appears to go through the sideways movement.

The Yellow Wagtails — *Motacilla flava* :

Are represented in my grounds by *thunbergi* and *melanogrisea*.

Yellow headed Wagtail — *Motacilla citreola*

Have only seen it once, but then it is a bird which prefers to stay at and near jheels, riverbeds and so on.

Grey Wagtail — *Motacilla cinerea*

Comes regularly in small numbers.

Pied, or White, Wagtail — *Motacilla alba*

These arrive earlier than the other wagtails and are also seen more often. They move about on dry ground as well as in the irrigated areas.

Common Rosefinch, — Scarlet Grosbeak — *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Seen perched on a *Prosopis spicigera* tree just outside my northern boundary wall. I have only come across this bird twice. The first time I saw it was in Mandvi on 29.12.63 and then here on 12.3.82. The Rosefinch attracts one's attention by its pleasant call note, twee-ee or tree-ee which is repeated at intervals of a few minutes. It is a rare winter visitor.

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Blackheaded Bunting — *Emberiza melanocephala*

This is an irregular winter visitor to this part of the country. They arrive in Kutch mostly in autumn when the grain is being harvested, and then move on. I have also seen them in spring, at which time the wheat ripens; and once the harvest is over they leave. They have come into my place only once on 6.4.68.

This brings me to the end of the list of birds seen in my grounds. I have given my comments on them which I thought might be found interesting by the readers. In preparing the above, besides of course my own notes I have relied on 'The Birds of Kutch' by Salim Ali, the main reference has been from 'A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan' by S. Dillon Ripley II.

# BIRD LIFE OF INDIA (Contd.)

MADHAV GADGIL & RANJIT DANIELS

## 4. Species Diversity

On a global scale, species diversity is enhanced by :

- a) Invasion of a new adaptive zone by an evolutionary lineage crossing an ecological threshold
- b) Divergence of two geographically isolated populations due to some barriers to dispersal.

On a local scale, species diversity is enhanced by :

Immigration and successful establishment of a new species that can utilize a habitat or a resource for which there is little competition from already existing species.

Species diversity decreases globally or locally through extinction of a species population. Such an extinction may result from competition, predation or other negative interactions with other living organisms, or by a change in environment that the species cannot cope up with, or through purely random processes.

The diversity of any group of organisms may therefore be interpreted in terms of barriers to their dispersal, the variety of habitats they may inhabit and the partitioning of resources by the species within any given habitat. Any given region may therefore be more diverse if

- a) there are more barriers to dispersal.
- b) there is a greater variety of habitat types, and
- c) if a species can be more specialized in terms of resource use enabling finer partitioning of niches.

## Global Patterns

Let us begin with global patterns of bird diversity in light of these ideas. The total bird fauna of the world, of 9040 species belonging to 163 families may be partitioned into oceanic and land birds. The oceanic birds have of course to spend a few months every year on land to breed, but their breeding sites too are small islands in the sea. The oceanic birds all tend to be strong fliers and their habitat tends to be largely unbroken. Hence Auks (Alcidae) with 22 species confined to the continent bound northern seas is the only family of oceanic birds with a restricted distribution, the other families are worldwide. The oceanic environments are also rather homogeneous with much less scope for partitioning of habitats or resources. Hence, in spite of oceans covering over 70% of the earth's surface, the 285 species belonging to 12 families account for less than 3% of the total bird species diversity. This is in spite of the fact that oceanic birds can be very abundant; the world's most abundant bird species is in fact Wilson's Storm Petrel. It visits our shores too, and is one of the very few species breeding in the southern hemisphere to do so.

The other 8800 species of land birds are distributed over six zoogeographical regions of the world as follows :

Region	Species	Families	Endemic Families
Nearctic	650	52	0
Palaeartic	750	69	1
Neotropics	2900	97	32
Ethiopian	1900	67	8
Oriental	1500	83	1
Australian	1200	83	14

South America and Australia, the two continents that have been most isolated over the geological history since the origin of birds have the maximum number of endemic families, the Ethiopian region comes next. Since the Oriental region of which India forms a part has had connections with the Palearctic and Ethiopian, it has just one endemic family, Irenidae to which belong the Fairy Bluebird, Ioras and Chloropsises. These are forest birds of relatively low dispersal propensities, which is perhaps why they are restricted to this region.

The oriental region is also behind the other two tropical regions, Neotropical and Ethiopian in the total number of species, although ahead of the three temperate regions of Australasia, Palearctic and Nearctic. The fact that the three tropical regions have significantly higher levels of species diversity is indicative of the remarkable temperate-tropical diversity gradient that holds for most animal groups. Thus the tiny Central American country of Colombia has 1600 species, more than double the whole continent of North America with its 650 species. But of the three tropical regions Neotropical is by far the richest, whilst Oriental has fewer species than Ethiopian as well. This is in part related to the greater diversity of environmental regimes in the other two regions; the Oriental being essentially a tract of humid forests. In fact the Thar desert of Indian subcontinent is considered part of the Ethiopian region, and parts of higher Himalayas that of Palearctic region. Secondly, birds have undergone a tremendous radiation in the highly productive large tract of Amazonian rain forests, with for instance, 330 species of humming birds. There has been no comparable radiation of any bird family in the more seasonal and more fragmented humid forests of the Oriental region.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE DAY MID-WINTER COUNT IN WATER FOWL RESEARCH

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We are beginning to recover and every Birdwatcher in our Country and for most part the readers of the 'News Letter' Bulletin, are aware that in January 1988, the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) completed its second round of one day midwinter count of water-birds in India and other Asian countries. The data on the first ever 1987 survey collected by the national coordinator with the help of volunteers was sent to the International Coordinator at Slimbridge (U.K.) for compilation. The final report published by the IUCN's Conservation Monitoring Centre (CMC) at Cambridge has been sent to each country long back.

Going through the pages of this inventory on water-birds one cannot but be impressed about the value this great project is charged with in the upliftment of waterfowl research in Asian Countries. An attempt is made in this article to highlight and show how certain informations recorded in the inventory are of value to Waterbird scientists engaged in research in our country.

For instance, the duck research group studying the distribution, status and population, trends of geese wintering in India, can use counts gathered by volunteers and the resulting population trends can be useful to wetland management. The importance of one day waterfowl count does not just lie in the assessment of numbers but, their overall study and repeated counts add immensely to our knowledge about movements, variety and especially the increasing threats with which cranes, ducks and geese are affected in different areas and endangered. In the classified countrywise-lists of 1987 inventory the Barheaded goose (*Anser indicus*) has been found restricting its winter-visits only to Nepal and India and not to other countries. This observation if confirmed after a few more intensive surveys would give an impetus to the study of migration, feeding ecology as well as wetland management in parts where these birds actually congregate.

Way-finding and selection of specific feeding grounds during winter-journey appear somewhat characteristic to grainivorous water birds. It may be mentioned here that a young member of the Barheaded goose (*Anser indicus*) ringed on 28th July, 1984 at QINGHAI LAKE in GANGCA COUNTY, QINGHAI PROVINCE, Peoples Republic of China was caught by a fisherman in November 1986 at Haveri Tank (Dharwad), Karnataka, India and the ring was recovered by the authors from the fisherman during 1988 census work. A note on this event was published in the March/April issue of 'News Letter' Vol. XXVIII No.3 and 4,

Page 15. This has now been confirmed through a reply letter received from Mr. John Howes, Training Officer (AWB) Malaysia, ref. his letter No. 1023/88/c/JH dt. 7th July, 1988 and the National Bird Banding Centre of the Peoples Republic of China. There is a rich opportunity for starting short and long term migration studies in areas of Dharwad in Karnataka and if done so it will help in the effective management of wetland sites.

Further, the 1987 lists disclose certain facts about the members of the family *Anatidae* which are more uniformly distributed all over Asia except in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. The Teal populations are highest in Pakistan and India. The Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) is absent in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Hongkong and Thailand. This needs further study. The two rare storks (i) *Ciconia ciconia* and (ii) *Ciconia nigra* called the White stork and Black stork respectively are confined to Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. Similarly the population size of yet another important member of the stork-family which is resident to India namely the Black necked Stork (*Fphippi-orhunchus asiaticus*) is gradually dwindling away. It needs protection as only 50 members have appeared. They are confined to Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. A small number of Black Storks about 8 of them have been detected also in Gujarat. A survey of the Southern region needs to be undertaken to decide their distribution in India.

The occurrence of 13 varieties of ducks in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu speaks of the potentiality and status of natural wetlands existing in these areas of our country. Is not the one day midwinter waterfowl census of great value for wetlands and wild life conservation? and cannot counting birds and identifying them be made a nation wide event to develop interest in local action and public participation in census work? Let us hope that more volunteers will respond to the 1989 January Count.

### TIME TO PULL THE ALARM !! - FOR THE BLACKBELLIED TERN

TAEJ MUNDKUR  
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The Blackbellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* is a resident species in India. In the past, the bird was found in Gujarat and was known to nest at reservoirs in Bhavnagar and Jasdan. During the last three years of extensive field work in Saurashtra, I have failed to see even one individual of this species. Enquiries about sightings with other birdwatchers in the state have also been negative. It is quite possible that since the last three years have experienced insufficient rainfall, a cause for decline in numbers and depressed breeding success for most bird species, the Blackbellied Tern has moved out of this area.

In January 1987, a waterfowl census was carried by numerous birdwatchers in many parts of our country. From

the data collected, it was seen that there were no sightings of this species in India. This of course does not mean that there are no Blackbellied Terns left, as the census was incomplete in most senses.

If the Blackbellied Tern is on the way out, it may not be the only bird in this category. Our knowledge of birds in this country is still very rudimentary, and we are still unaware of the status of most of our species. As this country is very large, it is beyond the reach of one organisation for study. Unless immediate efforts are made to take stocks of all our bird species on an area wise, state and then country wide level, we will continue to lose more and more species without realising it. It is here that we really need the contribution of all keen amateur and professional birdwatchers who will be able to contribute a great deal of vital information. Species by species listing of bird abundance, known nesting areas, immediate threats to each species, causes of these threats and possible methods to reduce or prevent destruction of key habitats should be taken up. Instead of a single species approach, a habitat approach may be worthwhile and easier to undertake. Projects on the Great Indian Bustard and Lesser Frigate are two good examples of such country level studies that have provided important information and protection to these species.

With India marching ahead in all fields of progress and development, it is obvious that we are rapidly destroying many of our important habitats, be them grasslands, mangrove forests or mountain forests. As a result, we are bound to be endangering and losing many of our species of animals and plants. It is usual that the more beautiful or sympathy arousing species attract the scientific and thereafter and more importantly, the public eye and attention. This often leads to the raising of funds for research, private and government protection and more often than not in the formation of a protection area for the species under consideration. Where as other species that surround us, that may not be so "glamorous" to our eye are often allowed to quietly become rare and then be pushed to the brink of extinction without coming to the notice of man. In the process we will continue to lose species that serve the same role in the chain of life but were unfortunate in not catching our fancy for one reason or the other.

Coming back to the Blackbellied Tern, it is probably too early to pull the chain of alarm, but it is a possible candidate for extinction, atleast at the Gujarat state level. I would request readers to send in their views on the status of this species in their areas. Beware of similarities of this species with the Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* in the summer plumage and the Indian River Tern *Sterna aurantia* in the winter.

## BIRTH OF A BIRD SANCTUARY

Ananta Mitra, Calcutta.

About seven years ago on 26.12.1980, after a day-long trip of bird-watching in the suburbs, myself and my friend Sri Dependu Roy Chowdhury were returning to the city in the evening. Both of us were members of Prakriti Samsad, a natural history society of Calcutta and were in search of habitats where birds concentrate.

In the train, we made friends with passengers close to us and discussed with them about our mission. One among the group, Sri Prabir Ghosh informed us that there was a big concentration of migratory birds in his locality at Santragachi in Howrah. He said that he had found a large number of birds in the Railway Jheel there, only a few days back.

Back to Calcutta we passed on the information to the members of the Samsad, and a trip was organised. On the early morning of 28.12.1980, myself and Sri Roy Chowdhury accompanied by six other members, namely Sarbasree Kushal Mukherjee, Kalyan De, Pradip Dhar, Satrajit Roy, Jyotirmoy Ganguly and Anil Gupta set out for the Jheel with ardent and eager expectation.

On reaching the Lake we were enraptured. Thousands of wild ducks were in congregation on the placid water of the Jheel and along the vegetations all around its bank. It was a glorious sight. The birdsite of Santragachi was thus discovered. It flashed around the nature-lovers of the country.

Dedicated members of the Samsad started observations, listing and research and we initiated a campaign to have the site declared a Sanctuary for birds. Day by day, month by month the campaign gathered momentum with the aid of various media.

We discussed with the World Wild Life Fund-India, State administration, Zoological Survey of India, Forest Department, and others and submitted our requests to the S.E. Railway authorities

Samsad's Journal, Naturalist Vol-1, published notes on Santragachi and came forth with the names of 49 species of birds so far listed by our members. Newspapers, Journals, Radio, and Television began to circulate the news about the enchanting birds of the Lake and greatly boosted our efforts to conserve them.

The youths of the locality were keenly conscious about the protection of the habitat and devoutly co-operated with us. The Chhottodal Club of Baksara under the leadership of Sri Arup Goswami and others, kept a firm and constant vigil to save the birds from being killed or damaged.

Our crusades started bearing fruits. Directorate of the Zoological Survey of India under the able leadership of Dr. A.K. Ghosh took active interest in the matter and held parleys with the General Manager and other authorities of the S.E. Rly.

Our arduous efforts ultimately succeeded. The year 1987 was the centenary year for the South-Eastern Railway and they decided to properly celebrate it. As one of the steps to mark the occasion, S.E.R. took the momentous decision to make the charming Jheel of Santragachi a Sanctuary for birds, and it was so declared.

In September, 1987, to the great delight of all naturalists, environmentalists and bird-lovers, a notice-board in recognition of the Sanctuary was set up on the northern bank of the Lake with the following legend depicted in bold characters :

'S.E. Railway, Centenary Sanctuary for migratory birds at Santragachi', and in Bengali, the words — 'Pakhiralaya' (Abode for birds) was inscribed therein.

The present writer had the most pleasant experience of sighting this Board, for the first time, on his trip there on 24.12.1987. He felt the joyful throbs in his heart, watching the fascinating creatures in the Jheel under the cool-shade of that large Notice Board. For the, current season, several thousands of Teals and other birds have already taken shelter in the Lake.

In respect of gaining small sanctuaries in the neighbourhood of Calcutta whose environmental balance is seriously in jeopardy, this is our second success. The first one is Narendrapur Bird Park, 20 km. South of Calcutta, which was declared a Sanctuary by the State Government in July, 1980.

Although the nature lovers and environmentalists of Calcutta are passing through very critical days, yet they should not lose heart and should take courage in both hands and continue their crusade to protect the still-left areas of Salt Lake, the Brane Bridge, the Jheels of C.C. Rly, near Dankuni, Kalyani Lake, Haroa-Marshes and others in West Bengal.

As for Santragachi, I urge for the following steps :—

1. Erections of house-blocks by the S.E. Rly., along the northern edge of the Jheel must be stopped with immediate effect.
2. The Lake should be expanded by connecting it with the adjoining Jheel on the west, and the passage in-between the two Jheels should be removed, and re-routed from further west, and
3. Proper arrangements must be made for the maintenance and management of the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary at Santragachi is a small one. Its area is 850 metres by 300 metres, having an average depth of 2.5 metres. It is 12 K.M. to the West of Calcutta and has a Railway Station of its own on the S.E. Railway. It accommodates about 5 to 7 thousands migratory birds in the winter and gives shelters to several hundreds of residential ones throughout the year.

A sketch map of the Sanctuary is attached for necessary inclusion.

## SOME BIRDS OF AHMEDNAGAR

FAREED TYABJI. VADALA MAHADEO

I will relate some experiences which may be interesting. I planted some two acres of "Tuvar". It came up and the plants were thickly laden with pods. Two problems then arose. A very large number of insects (borers) attacked the crop and a very large number of birds appeared. We employed women to scare the birds away. We then sprayed with a poison. The spraying did no good as the borers got inside the pods. An idea occurred to me and I stopped the women from driving away the birds. Within a week no insects were left.

### Peacocks

Some years ago a single large peacock strayed into our farm from somewhere, and used to take up residence on a large neem tree during the night. This lonely visit went on for a number of years. Then he brought along three or four hens. They appear to like the place and their number is increasing. The other day I counted 25 and then saw a large number further away. We were a little nervous about damage to our crops. So far we have not only not noticed any damage to our crops, but there is a definite decrease in the attack of borers on mangoes and other crops.

### Other Small Birds

During the severe paucity of water, we used to try and keep water for the birds. Very soon we found large numbers of various types coming to drink specially in the afternoon.

## AN ENCOUNTER WITH INDIAN GRIFON VULTURE, GYPS FULVUS FULVESCENS, HUME — A RARE VARIETY

P.S. THAKKER, Ahmedabad.

Strange it may sound, but the very fact of stoning the birds, led two young naturalists — Mr. K.R. Christian and Mr. P.J. Jamod — to rescue one giant bird near Ranip, Ahmedabad on November 21, 1987. This bird (Indian Griffon Vulture) was sighted/recorded in Ahmedabad after a long time.

As the bird was injured and being night time these persons took it along to their house. Seeing a stranger in the compound of the house, even the dogs and cats kept themselves away. In the morning, this bird was unable to fly/move owing to the injuries (muscular stretch of the wings). An alopahy doctor after examination/diagnosis, injected medicine. To our amazement the bird recovered fast from the injury. In spite of repeated attempts by the rescuers, the bird did not fly away. During the stay (November 22-29, 1987) its behaviour was observed. The bird used to enter the main house whenever the door was kept open and try to soothe itself by throwing its neck in the lap/arm of the house lady and subsequently mixed with all

the family members. It was also observed that the bird used to dip itself in the pond located in the same compound as if enjoying a good bath. Afterwards, it used to dry its wings by spreading like cormorant.

The spread of the wings was about nine feet from one edge to the other edge of the second wing. The colour was warm cinnamon brown on the dorsal side while it was pinkish brown with narrow pale shaft stripes on the ventral side of the wings. The feathers and tail was all black. However the colour of bare skin was brown and at places greenish blue. The head was uniformly covered by white hairs having ruff at the base of the neck. Rump was pure white having brown feathers. Legs and feet were whitish grey to yellow in colour. The length of the front nails was 1.25" while that of the hind nails was 1.50"

During its stay, it ate only pure, clean and fresh meat ranging from 750 gms to 1 kg once daily. It never touched the poor quality or stale meat whenever offered. The bird never drank water after food instead it used to swallow the secretion coming out of nostril along the beak. The secretion was observed to be proportionate to the food intake. This secretion from nostril may be having some digestive property, perhaps like human saliva.

When it became a headache, the rescuers' family stopped giving food. This led the bird to fly away and was not slighted again in that locality.

From the literature it is found that the bird is rare in Gujarat. It is mentioned that the bird is found in semi-desert areas of Western Pakistan, Kachchha and North Gujarat. It has been recorded at Vadodara by Little dale (1874-1886 approximately) in North Gujarat and Saurashtra by Buttler (1874-1886 approximately) at Ahmedabad by Shri Harinarayan Acharya (1930-1940 approximately) and in Kachchha by Salim Ali (1930-1940 approximately).

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No. 1-8/88-WL 1  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
Ministry of Environment and Forests  
Department of Environment, Forests and Wildlife

New Delhi, Dated, the 28th July, 1988.

To  
The Forest Secretary,  
Government of all States and UTs

Sir.

Government of India has been receiving reports that the blacknecked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) is getting rare, partly because of difficulty in lack of suitable areas for nesting but mainly because of competition with fishermen and other adverse impacts on the wetlands. Reports have

also been received that the State Chief Wildlife Wardens are issuing permits to capture this bird to be kept in zoos. There are already a substantial number of birds in most of our zoos and the stork does not breed easily in captivity. In any case, there would be no justification in capturing this bird from the wild for purposes of keeping in zoos even for breeding purposes, because the progeny would not be rehabilitated into the wild.

2. It is, therefore, requested that Chief Wild Life Wardens may kindly issue instructions that this bird and its habitat may be given special attention and all possible attempts be made to safeguard both. Special attention needs also to be given to the preservation of the wetlands and to eliminate, and if that be not possible, to reduce to the maximum extent possible, competition with fishermen in wildlife sanctuaries. It would be appropriate if fishing is phased out in sanctuaries as soon as possible. Furthermore, an attempt may kindly be made to ascertain the present status and distribution of this bird and I will be grateful if you could kindly let me have your report in this regard by 30th of October, 1988.

3. The Government of India is considering the upgradation of this bird from Schedule IV under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 to Schedule I. Meanwhile, it is requested that no permission may kindly be given for the capture of this bird.

Yours faithfully,

(RANJITSINH)  
Joint Secretary (W)

Copy to : 1. All Chief Wildlife Wardens of States/UTs.  
2. Shri J.C. Daniel, Curator, Bombay National History Society, Hombill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay.

## CRESTED TERN SPOTTED NEAR UDUPI

Dr. N.A. MADHYASTHA &  
K.S. HARSHAVARDHAN BHAT

On 31st August, we received a news from the local daily "Udayavani", about the arrival of a strange bird on the sea shore, 28 kms south of Udupi (Karnataka). We immediately went there and found that it was a crested tern (*Sterna bengalensis*). It was in a pathetic condition and died on the next day.

We were told by the local people that the bird had a plastic ring around its leg; but we were at loss to trace the ring.

From the Hand Book of the Birds of India and Pakistan (Dr. Salim Ali), it is evident that *Sterna bengalensis* is a typical sea bird keeping to off-shore waters, seldom seen on the coast. It is the commonest bird of Karachi Harbour and Coast line.

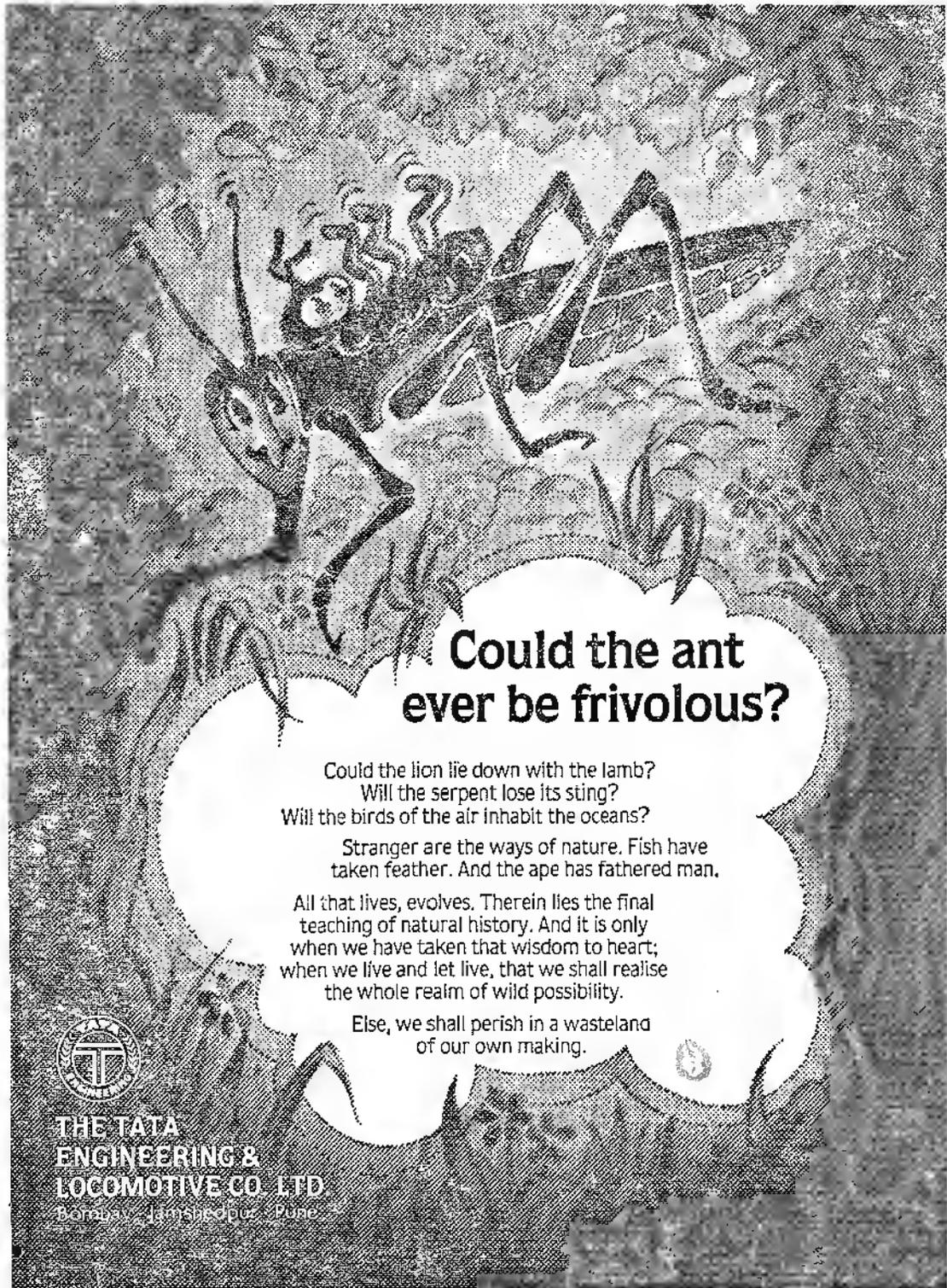
Now, we wish to know from where it could have been ringed and whether there are any similar spottings else where along our coast.



**An encounter with  
Indian Grifon Vulture**

See article by Mr. Thakkar (on Page 8)





## Could the ant ever be frivolous?

Could the lion lie down with the lamb?  
Will the serpent lose its sting?  
Will the birds of the air inhabit the oceans?

Stranger are the ways of nature. Fish have  
taken feather. And the ape has fathered man.

All that lives, evolves. Therein lies the final  
teaching of natural history. And it is only  
when we have taken that wisdom to heart;  
when we live and let live, that we shall realise  
the whole realm of wild possibility.

Else, we shall perish in a wasteland  
of our own making.



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